

Furthermore, once they have become enlightened, even if they leave their bodies, their mental continua will go on, and by taking on new bodies they will continue to work towards leading all sentient beings to enlightenment.

- Regarding the difference between a conventional and ultimate refuge, someone asserts the following: "Nagarjuna says in his **Fundamental Wisdom (Mulamadhyamikakarika)**:

*The Buddha taught: "A phenomenon  
That is deceptive is false."  
All conditioned phenomena are deceptive phenomena;  
Hence they are false.*

Therefore, all conventional objects of refuge are conditioned objects of refuge and all ultimate objects of refuge are unconditioned objects of refuge. This is what Asanga says in his **Great Commentary of the Uttaratantra**."

Panchen Sonam Drakpa's reply is that according to our own system, this explanation is not correct because the 'conditioned phenomena' described in Asanga's **Great Commentary** and the 'conditioned phenomena' described in Nagarjuna's **Fundamental Wisdom** are not equivalent.

The 'conditioned phenomena' described in Asanga's commentary refer to phenomena that are conditioned by contaminated karma and delusions. However, the 'conditioned phenomena' described in Nagarjuna's **Fundamental Wisdom** refer to phenomena that are conditioned by causes and conditions. Phenomena that are conditioned by causes and conditions are phenomena that change moment by moment and are therefore impermanent.

[Furthermore, in Asanga's **Great Commentary** the word 'deceptive' refers to conventional objects of refuge, whereas in Nagarjuna's **Fundamental Wisdom** 'deceptive' refers to conventional truths.]

If that was not the case, that is, if the 'conditioned phenomena' described in Asanga's **Great Commentary** and in Nagarjuna's **Fundamental Wisdom** were equivalent and referred both to phenomena conditioned by causes and conditions (i.e. impermanent phenomena) [and if both texts described conventional refuges] then all impermanent objects of refuge would absurdly be deceptive refuges, and therefore conventional objects of refuge. The absurd consequence of this in turn would be that a Buddha's two Rupakayas would not be ultimate objects of refuge but deceptive or conventional objects of refuge. The two Rupakayas would be deceptive or conventional objects of refuge because they are conditioned by causes and conditions.

Whatever is conditioned by causes and conditions would necessarily be a deceptive or conventional object of refuge because Nagarjuna says in the above cited verse from the **Fundamental Wisdom**:

*All conditioned phenomena are deceptive phenomena*

However, it is not correct to assert that a Buddha's two Rupakayas are conventional refuges because they are ultimate refuges. The two Rupakayas are ultimate refuges because they are genuinely final objects of refuge.

Having refuted this wrong assertion Panchen Sonam Drakpa continues his explanation of conventional and ultimate objects of refuge by citing four syllogisms. These syllogisms are from Maitreya's **Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)** and present the reason for why particular objects of refuge are *not* ultimate refuges

Maitreya says in his **Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)**:

*Because [the Dharma] is to be abandoned, deceptive,  
And an absence, and because [the Sangha] has fear,  
The two types of Dharma and the Arya Assembly  
Do not represent stable, foremost refuges.*

The four syllogisms are:

- i. The subject, **the Dharma** of scripture (i.e. the teachings of the Buddha) is not an ultimate object of refuge **because** – even though it is something to be relied upon as a method to directly realize

- its meaning – it is also of the type that, when attaining enlightenment, **is to be abandoned** like a boat [which is left behind once one has crossed the water].
- ii. The subject, an Arya Bodhisattva's wisdom that directly realizes selflessness is not an ultimate refuge because it is a **deceptive** phenomenon due to depending on the imprints of ignorance.
  - iii. The subject, the Hinayana Nirvana without remainder is not an ultimate refuge because it is merely **an absence** or elimination of the truth of suffering and the truth of origin
  - iv. The subject, Hearer Arhats are not ultimate truths **because** they **have fear** of the cognitive obstructions

Therefore, the Dharma of scripture, **the two types of Dharma** (i.e. Arya paths and cessations) in the continua of sentient beings, and **the Arya Assembly** who have not attained enlightenment yet **do not represent stable** and **foremost** ultimate **refuges**.

However, here the Dharma of scripture, that according to the **Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)** is not an ultimate refuge, needs to be specified. Gyaltsab je explains in his **Commentary on the Uttaratantra** that the Dharma of scripture, that is here described to not be an ultimate refuge, does *not* refer to the words that were actually spoken by the Buddha, or, literally, that "pertained to the Buddha's continuum" (because these are an ultimate refuge). The Dharma of scripture that is not an ultimate refuge rather refers to the teachings of the Buddha that appear to sentient beings ear or mental consciousness. An example for scriptural Dharma that is a conventional object of refuge is the **Heart Sutra** that appears to practitioners ear consciousnesses when it is recited before the teachings.

Maitreya's **Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)** continues:

*In a true sense only the Buddha  
Is the refuge of migratory beings,  
Since the Conqueror possesses the Dharmakaya  
And since the Assembly also progresses towards the final goal [of attaining the Dharmakaya]*

Hence, **in a true sense only the Buddha** Jewel, who is endowed with the three bodies, **is the ultimate refuge of migratory beings, since the Conqueror, the Buddha, possesses the Dharmakaya and since the Arya Assembly also must progress towards the final goal of attaining the Dharmakaya.**

#### 4. The meaning of the word 'Jewel'

In Tibetan the word 'Jewel' or *dkon mchog* – pronounced: *koen chog* – literally means 'rare and foremost' (dkon = rare, mchog = foremost). It is derived from the term 'ratna' which is the Sanskrit term for Jewel. Therefore, this section of the text presents through the analogy of wish-fulfilling gems six reasons for why the three Jewels are named 'rare and foremost'.

Maitreya says in his **Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)**:

*Their occurrence is rare, they are free from defilement,  
They possess power, they are ornaments  
Of the world, they are foremost,  
They do not change, hence they are [named] 'rare and foremost.'*

- I. Just as **the occurrence** of wish-fulfilling gems in this world **is rare**, the occurrence of the Three Jewels is rare.  
According to Gyaltsab je's **Commentary on the Uttaratantra**, this teaches that countless sentient beings do not have the root virtue to encounter the Three Jewels. Therefore, having encountered the Three Jewels we should make a great effort to properly take refuge and practice the teachings.
- II. Just as wish-fulfilling gems **are free from defilements** such as dust, the Three Jewels are free from faults.  
According to Gyaltsab je's **Commentary on the Uttaratantra**, this teaches that the Three Jewels are the perfect refuge. Thus, we should not rely on other refuges such as worldly deities, etc.
- III. Just as wish-fulfilling gems **possess the power** to alleviate poverty, the Three Jewels possess the power to eradicate disciple's suffering.

